10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

PAUL RADIN

THE ROAD OF LIFE AND DEATH

A RITUAL DRAMA
OF THE AMERICAN INDIANS
WITH A FOREWORD BY MARK VAN DOREN

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[Title Page]

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

II. Winnebago Civilization and the Medicine Rite

1. INTRODUCTORY

The Winnebago are a Siouan-speaking people belonging to a group of tribes that are today spread from Wisconsin to Montana and from Oklahoma to Saskatchewan and Alberta. At the time of the discovery of America some members of this stock extended as far south

[pp. 1-48 not processed]

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105 as southern Louisiana and as far east as Virginia and South Carolina. Then, however, their northern and western extension had taken them no farther than North Dakota.

Apart from the Winnebago, the best known members of this far-flung stock are the Dakota, Omaha, Osage, Iowa and Oto.

With negligible exceptions, the civilization of all these tribes was essentially the same and many of its traits were shared by other tribes contiguous to the Siouan, speaking distinct languages such as the Pawnee, Arikara, Creek, Choctaw, etc. All were agricultural, possessed, by and large, the same general type of social organization, religion, mythology and ritualism. The center of this civilization lay presumably, somewhere along the lower Mississippi from which it must have spread north, east and west along its main affluents, the Arkansas, Missouri and Ohio, rivers. I, for one, am of the opinion that not a few of its distinctive characteristics, particularly in religion, ritualism and mythology, it owes to influences that came ultimately from Mexico, possibly no earlier than the twelfth century A.D.

Although the Winnebago were first encountered by the French far to the north, at Green Bay in northeastern Wisconsin, completely cut off from their nearest kinsmen, the Iowa and Oto, they belong definitely further south and west, probably in eastern Iowa.

To understand Winnebago civilization and, incidentally, the history and significance of the Medicine Rite, it is necessary to keep in mind two historical facts, first, that the Winnebago belong to the highly complex widespread general civilization we have just mentioned and, secondly, that they were completely cut off from this civilization by simpler tribes with whom they were almost continuously at war. As a result of this peculiar situation they were able to keep much of their older culture intact, particularly their whole social, religious and ritualistic systems. Entirely uninfluenced by these simpler tribes they did not remain but what they borrowed was not important. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they were at times drawn into more intimate contact with some of these tribes, during the intervals when they were not fighting them, and it is from one of them, the Fox, that they probably

adopted the specific shooting ritual today practiced in the Medicine Rite. 105

It is just this contrast between the manner in which the basic older structure remained intact and yet new elements were freely adopted that is so characteristic of the Winnebago civilization. The explanation for their ability to do both these things lies in the fact that, like the Iroquois and Navajo, they have always quickly transformed and reinterpreted the influences which they absorbed from the outside. We shall shortly see how the history and analysis of the Medicine Rite illustrates all these three tendencies, the marked conservatism of old patterns, the receptivity to new ideas and the capacity for making new integrations. Before turning to this history, it will be best, first, to give a brief sketch of the Winnebago civilization as a whole, particularly those phases of the social organization, religion, ritualism and mythology, which can throw light on the Medicine Rite.

2. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Winnebago social organization contains two structural patterns characteristic of many North American Indian tribes, first, the division of the tribe into two halves and, second, the clan. Every clan belongs to either one or the other of these two halves or phratries, called respectively, those-from-above or upper people and those-from-the-earth or lower people. 105 614 616

The phratries possess, or rather possessed at one time, a number of distinctive and fundamental functions, lay and religious. Marriage within the same phratry, for instance, was forbidden. Each phratry had different burial customs. In the ceremonial lacrosse game one was always pitted against the other.

Nowhere were these contrasting duties and functions more fundamental, however, than in the political-social realm. In the upper phratry are centered, in the person of the tribal chief, all the peace and humanitarian functions of the tribe. He is selected from the clan generally regarded as the most important one in the tribe, the 105 614 616 622

105 thunderbird. He is the representative of peace, par excellence. He
614 cannot go to war or have anything to do with the many war cere-
616 monies of the tribe. Be it remembered that victory on the warpath is
622 the highest honor a Winnebago can attain. He must succour the needy and plead for clemency in all cases of infractions of tribal law and custom, even in case of murder. His lodge is a sacred asylum and
[778] absolutely inviolate. Not only is a prisoner of war safe if he manages to take refuge there, but even a dog, about to be sacrificed, must be spared, should he manage to run into it. Naturally all the other male members of the thunderbird clan as well as all the male members of the other clans in the upper phratry, go on the warpath and seek prestige through war. But, after all, this warfare is waged against people who have no status within the tribe. Acquiescence in it does not constitute approval of violence nor is it regarded as a resort to violence. And it is this condemnation of violence for which the tribal chief and his phratry stands.

105 In contrast to this is the attitude of the chief of the lower division,
614 who always belongs to the bear clan. In him are centered pre-
616 eminently the police, the disciplinary and the war functions. He and
622 his associates police and guard the village, inflict punishment for
625 transgressions of law and custom, take charge of the whole tribe when it is on a communal warpath or engaged in hunting, etc. It is in the official lodge of the bear chief that prisoners are confined before being killed and it is in the same lodge where the sacred warbundles are stored and guarded against contamination.

105 We are dealing here with a very old and persistent classification
616 of the two opposing forces in society and one which reflects the
622 answer to a question asked repeatedly, namely, how are we to meet
182 the two aspects of life and of reality with which we are being con-
577 tinually confronted, the protective, constructive and positive, and the repelling, destructive and negative? Winnebago thinkers seemed to have been particularly fond of posing this problem.

It is not strange then, that they should have felt the contrast between the functions of the two phratries to lie, fundamentally, in their attitude toward evil. For the tribal chief evil was to be warded off before it came and always by passive methods. If that did not

succeed and evil was already upon the tribe, then his attention was directed toward alleviating the suffering caused by it and toward preventing any violence that might come in its wake. His function was to be protective and constructive. As one Winnebago told me, 'The chief of the tribe is like a motherbird feeding its young ones.'

The chief of the lower division, by contrast, went out to meet evil, attacked it ferociously when encountered, and paid little attention to the violent mood it developed among the defender-assailants. The important thing was to attack, fight and gain the victory.

The two opposing approaches to the problem can best be illustrated by the attitudes of the two chiefs toward sickness and murder. The tribal chief meets the first by giving a feast of conciliation and making direct appeals to Earthmaker. The chief of the lower division, on the other hand, immediately starts in pursuit of it. With his assistants he makes the circuit of the village four times to look for its cause. He is on the warpath and should a dog cross his path, he is immediately killed. Then he pays a visit to the sick people, dances before them and lays his hands upon them.

If a murder has been committed, the tribal chief not only intercedes for the life of the murderer but actually, if need be, offers to take the place of the malefactor. The chief of the lower division, on the other hand, seizes the murderer and conducts him to the family of the murdered person to be punished.

The objects associated with the two chiefs are typical and symbolical of their activities. For the first it is the peace-pipe, the emblem of conciliation and humility; for the second, a curiously formed baton, the emblem of punishment and pain, with which, when need be, he strikes those who transgress.

The recognition of these two aspects of social life and reality, contradictory, colliding, complementary, had its counterpart in the Winnebago analysis of human nature. There too, they insisted, good and evil, the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the profane, seemed forever at strife and forever striving for reconciliation, neutralization or fusion. This philosophy, we shall now see, is reflected, particularly, in mythology, religion and ritualism.

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

3. MYTHOLOGY

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Running through the whole of Winnebago mythology-literature, is the distinction between two types of narrative, the worak and the waikā. The first, literally translated, means *what-is-recounted*, and the second *what-is-sacred*. The worak belongs to the realm of what is regarded as true and humanly possible and attainable, as pertaining to the present workaday world as we know it. The hero must be a human being and the plot must end tragically. The waikā, on the other hand, belongs to the past that is irretrievably gone, to the realm of things no longer possible or attainable by man. It pertains to the world of spirits and deities, to the world of wish fulfillment. The hero must be a divine personage and immortal and the end can never be tragic. A waikā can become a worak by the simple device of bringing the plot into relationship with the contemporary human scene. The divine being has then become, for the time being, a human one. But there is no tragic dénouement. A worak, however, can never become a waikā.

As an example of the change from waikā to worak, let me take the cycle concerning the favorite heroes of the Winnebago, the Twins. Their adventures constitute real happenings and not, what one might have supposed far-off divine events, for one simple reason, namely, their resting-place is on earth and they, and this resting-place, have actually been seen by the fathers of present-day Indians.

It seems to have been one of the persistent endeavors of those Winnebago who reflected on such matters, to emphasize not only the distinctions mentioned above but, likewise, for them to link together the various adventures of their more important heroes into reasonably well-integrated epics, each one possessing its own developmental scheme. There are four such major cycles, that of Trickster, that of Hare, that of the battles of the good deities against the evil ones, and that of the Twins.

The theme of the Trickster epic is the unconscious, yet purposive, evolution of the hero from a grotesque, chaotic figure knowing neither good nor evil, to one with the lineaments of man. He symbolizes the gradual evolution from irresponsibility to responsibility.

Where Trickster stops Hare begins. He is a combination of a trickster and a culture-hero. His benefactions, for instance, are all accidental. But from the start, he possesses the lineaments of a human being and his orientation is toward man. He is no longer the supreme egoist that Trickster was. At the end of his adventures the earth has been transformed into a place where human beings can live and operate. 105 538 773

It is the function of the heroes of the third cycle to prevent this order which Hare has established from being again disrupted and returning to chaos. The function of the Twins is to continue the struggles of the heroes of the third cycle and to attempt to stabilize this order for all time.

Now although the theme of all these epics is the struggle against chaos and the introduction of order, each one of the great heroes of the last three epics, attempts to disrupt the order he has himself established. Hare brings death into the universe, Storms-as-he-walks, one of the heroes of the third cycle, kills wantonly and unnecessarily and the Twins kill one of the deities who hold our earth in place. In the case of the Twins it is important to stress the fact that, as we shall see, their attack on the world order is the result of exuberance of energy which is, in itself, constructive.

This same theme of the necessity for intelligent order and the establishment of stability runs, like a guiding thread, through the Origin Myth given on pages 17 ff. and pages 252 ff. There, the first problem of Earthmaker after he has, so to say, given himself a fixed orientation in the universe at large and brought about order within himself, is to stop the earth he has created from continuing its ceaseless motion. This he achieves by anchoring it at the four cardinal points and then weighing it down by means of vegetation and mountains. The anchorage, significantly enough, is brought about by pinning the island-earth down by four waterspirits and four snakes. Now snakes are the specifically sacred animals of the Winnebago, the intermediaries between the deities and man. Waterspirits, on the other hand, are, essentially, the most productively evil and dangerous of all the deities for man, fascinating him, confusing him, and placing in his hands the means for his own destruction and the destruction [825] [776]

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10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105 538 773 [776] of his fellowmen. By giving to the waterspirits the positive and constructive function of helping to stop the earth from spinning around and then holding it in place, part of their primary and ancient danger has thus been neutralized. Yet it can, at best—in fact, it must—only be neutralized. To destroy it completely would be equivalent to saying that man has ceased to err, overcome all temptation and become one of the deities. Such a condition, the Winnebago insist, neither the deities nor man desire.

According to the esoteric view, the ambivalent but fundamentally evil and disruptive nature of the blessings of the waterspirit have never ceased. It is one of the subtle and symbolic features of the final adventure of the Twins, namely, the destruction of one of the waterspirits, the anchorers of the earth, that they are, after all, only doing in a human fashion what Earthmaker himself found it necessary to do, prevent the waterspirits from harming man. They kill the waterspirit and feed on its body. They do not understand that disruption and disintegration represent one half of the process of living and can, at best, be neutralized and delayed, never eliminated and destroyed. It is the symbol for motion and change without which life not only ceases to exist but is indeed inconceivable. Earthmaker, of course, recognizes this and he must, therefore, put a stop to the activities of the Twins and he punishes them. Their punishment is a symbol for the error they have committed. They became fixed, motionless and permanent, both of them traits that, according to Winnebago beliefs, are forms of death. In the puberty vision-quest one of the signs that foreshadows death is to dream of rocks or stones.

I cannot think of a closer parallel to what has here happened to the waterspirits than that of the transformation, in the Oresteia of Aeschylus, of the Furies into beneficent creatures.

But to continue with the Origin Myth. Having created order within himself and established it for the stage on which man is to play, Earthmaker proceeds to create the first beings who are to people the universe, the spirits and deities. To each one he assigns a fixed and specific amount of power, to some more, to some less. In a nature religion like that of the Winnebago, this is, of course, only another way of giving the objects and forces of nature their

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105
538
773

various attributes. A definite gradation of power is thus established with no one spirit possessing powers even measurably comparable to those which Earthmaker has reserved for himself.

This principle of gradation and subordination is part of the order that Earthmaker is represented as introducing into the universe so that it can advantageously function. The instant it is changed there is danger and the threat of disruption. This is the theme of the first part of the Twin cycle, for instance. The plot is clear. The hero, one of the eight great Winnebago deities, Morning Star, has been decapitated by his enemy, a waterspirit. The body of the hero still remains alive and is being taken care of by his sister. The waterspirit, by keeping the head of Morning Star, has added the latter's power to his own. So formidable is this combination of powers that none of the deities, individually or in combination, are a match for him now. In fact only Earthmaker is his equal. Here is a threat of the first magnitude to the order ordained by Earthmaker and it must be met lest destruction overtake the world. Manifestly, the only manner of coping with the situation is to find some hero who can conquer the waterspirit, deprive him of the head of Morning Star and restore it to its owner.

But where is such a hero to be found? Nowhere. Consequently he must be newly created. This can be accomplished either by Earthmaker creating him directly as he has already done others or by his being born of some spirit. The days of special creation, however, are over. He must, therefore, be born as all creatures are now born, divine or human. But how can it be arranged that the hero, so born, has the requisite powers to achieve victory? The answer must be by such a hero being endowed for the task with enough power by all the deities, including Earthmaker.

This is accordingly done and these powers which will make its possessor greater than all the deities in existence and the equal of Earthmaker are delivered to the Sun with instructions that he impregnate the sister of Morning Star. The children born of Sun and the sister of Morning Star, who is herself a deity, are the Twins. They vanquish the waterspirit and restore the head of their uncle to his body. Thus the original order ordained by Earthmaker has been

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105
538
773

reestablished. Earthmaker, however, faced with the necessity of reestablishing it, has laid the seeds for further disruption by contravening the basic principle of limited and graded powers. The danger entering in such an act makes itself felt immediately; for the Twins, after completing their proper mission of destroying whatever evil spirits still exist on earth, or at least neutralizing them, destroy, as we have seen, one of the foundations of the earth. They do so in conformity with the Winnebago realistic conception that the possession of power necessitates its exercise.

Earthmaker, however, has no powers, within himself, to stop them. If, in the end, he does succeed, it is by a device which, on first blush, must strike us as puerile yet which is actually quite profound. He frightens them. The unafraid are made to be afraid, something that comes from within themselves. They try to hide and seek shelter, without success because, of course, they cannot hide from themselves. Finally, in desperation, they flee for protection to Earthmaker. This is, of course, what he is seeking. The moment they are in his possession and have come as suppliants, he has gained contact with them and thereby attained ascendancy over them. He can then speak to them and point out the nature of their transgression as well as its dangers. They recognize both and acquiesce cheerfully in the punishment meted out. Thus, for the time being, order and responsibility have again been reestablished in their rights.

We have so far dealt with the problem of order and disorder in its general, cosmological aspects. We must now take it up in its relation to man.

It is only after the spirits and deities have been created and endowed with the powers they are to have that Earthmaker, according to the Origin Myth, creates man. As the Winnebago say this happened at the end of Earthmaker's thoughts. Man is thus in the position of the orphan of Winnebago story: he possesses nothing. Earthmaker has nothing to give him. Accordingly, man is both weak and defenseless.

This depiction of man as completely unprovided for the vicissitudes of life, has a number of important implications. First of all, it is a well-recognized literary device, indeed almost a cliché, to have

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

the last and least qualified of the personages in a myth or tale, become the true hero. Secondly, it is the cardinal ethical principle of the Winnebago that the lowly shall be raised to high estate. That is the reward for humility. Thirdly, a hero or a virtuous man must show a development, must bring about order within himself. We have seen that hold true for Trickster, for Hare and for Earthmaker himself.

In both versions of the Origin Myth, man is projected naked into an atmosphere over which he has no control whatsoever and where he is immediately attacked by evil spirits. This is in flat contradiction with the accounts of his original state in the exoteric myths. There he is almost immediately placed in possession of tobacco, the intermediary between man and the deities, as well as of flint, corn, etc.

If this is not mentioned in the Origin Myth that is because he is not to save himself or receive the wherewithal of life through the accidental benefactions of culture-heroes. On the contrary, he is to be in dire straits and saved. Earthmaker is represented as withholding tobacco from the spirits in order to present it to man and as endowing these same spirits with an overpowering craving for it. In short, it is to be the mechanism for an exchange between man and the deities. He will give them tobacco; they will give him powers to meet life and overcome obstacles. Yet the deities cannot, by themselves, save him. They are at strife with one another. This can only be done by Earthmaker. For this purpose he dispatches the great primordial culture-heroes, Trickster, Bladder, Turtle and Hare to the earth.

This is a completely new role for all three. Naturally they do not succeed. They cannot be saviours. Their antecedents are against them. Trickster is the supreme egoist, the chaotic buffoon hero, a kind of Priapus, without any sense of responsibility and without purpose as far as man is concerned. His most positive contribution is to point out the stupidity, the cupidity, the vanities and foibles of creatures. He cannot help anyone. With man he has never had any connection. Turtle is not much better. He is the embodiment of cowardice, braggadocio and unabashed sensualism. The best he can do is to participate in warfare and, then, never as a hero.

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105 538 773 If Hare succeeds, it is because all his antecedents fit him better for the task. In the original Hare cycle he is born of a human woman and brought up by grandmother Earth herself. Although, at the beginning, his benefactions to mankind are all accidental, they do, at the end, give man the complete quota of his needs. It was comparatively easy to transform him into a hero without blemish. His one fault is demanding too much for man.

It is at this point that the problem of order versus disorder again presents itself. Not content with destroying evil on earth Hare demands immortality for his uncles and his nieces. Thus, like the Twins, he disrupts the world order through excess of constructive powers. But the difference between the Twins and Hare is that the former do it out of a kind of power drive while Hare does it in the supposed interests of man.

According to the story Hare, of course, fails. So obstinately, however, does he refuse to accept the inevitable that Earthmaker consents to an apparent revision of the world order in one respect. He will grant man the possibility of transcending death, by means of successive reincarnations, on condition that he agrees to face life and its vicissitudes in accordance with a specific ethical code. This is, of course, the theme of the Medicine Rite. For man, then, an exception to the law of birth, growth and death is permitted to this extent—he can repeat the cycle of birth, growth and decay an indefinite number of times.

But it is naturally in religion and ritualism that we must expect to find the best illustrations of the basic principles we have so far discussed in connection with social organization and mythology and to these we shall now turn.

4. RELIGION

105 121 771 Because of the highly complex character of Winnebago religion I shall confine myself primarily to an analysis of the nature of the powers the spirits and deities are supposed to possess, the relationship postulated between them and man, and the requests man makes

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

to them. To understand properly these three problems we must, at the outset, try to distinguish between the layman's and the priest's conception, between the exoteric and the esoteric viewpoint although, to be sure, the two are never mutually exclusive.

For the ordinary man, the lay Winnebago, the primary powers of the vast majority of the deities have always inhered in the deities themselves. They are their own possessions and have not been bestowed upon them from without. Moreover these powers relate to the actual natural functions these deities perform. The prayers of man to the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the Night-spirits, the Thunderbirds, etc. are, primarily, that they continue their functions and do not deviate from them. But man recognizes that they also have secondary functions, that, for instance, the sun, the morning and evenings stars, the thunderbirds, the night-spirits, all possess the power to give man long life and victory on the warpath; that the grizzly bear spirits have curative powers to bestow upon him and the waterspirits have special powers in connection with death-dealing medicines, etc. This socialization of the spirits and deities brings them that much closer to man. By bringing them this much closer to man they are deprived, however, of something of their independence and freedom of action. They have now become more specifically oriented toward mankind than toward their functioning in the universe at large. This change in orientation did not come about mechanically or accidentally. It represents the priest-thinker's conception, his attempt to establish linkages and meaningful relationships between men and the world of spirits. This attempt, from the nature of things, can never completely succeed for the simple reason that the primary functions of most of the nature gods—and they are the important ones—cannot be eliminated, must, in fact, not be eliminated. In the case, however, of animal deities, their older primary functions can be attenuated to a very marked extent and deities can be developed who never possessed functions other than those we have designated as secondary, that is, deities who function only in relation to man.

Since the nature gods, however, were the great gods, they served as patterns for all the others and the marked split in their orienta-

105 tion became, more or less, the characteristic of all spirits and deities.
771 The older condition, where the god concerned himself with his pri-
776 mary functioning and where relations to man were strictly neutral, was set off against his later condition where he was specifically enmeshed in man and man in him. These older deities—the waterspirits, for instance, belong here—never bestowed upon man either good or evil blessings. Like the waterspirits, they gave man the materials out of which he could prepare his own good or evil. That, I think, was always the lay point of view. Manifestly this led at times, to extreme individualism and clearly did not make for organization. The priest-thinker in seeking to bring more order into the various functions of the deities introduced new evaluations and new distinctions. For example, the earlier functioning of most of the deities was now interpreted as essentially evil or at least of no positive relation to man. In their later status, on the contrary, they generously brought man good blessings and they themselves became beneficent and friendly deities.

This socialization of the deities was entirely the work of the priest-thinkers. It succeeded completely, only in the case of Earthmaker and in their masterpiece, the Medicine Rite. In all other instances the lay interpretation was still largely dominant: man could never be certain what he would receive from the spirit to whom he was praying and making offerings, nor feel that he could always guard himself adequately against the dangers inherent in the approach to the supernatural. This uncertainty was expressed in a number of ways. One of them is very typical for the Winnebago. Every youth, during his puberty vision-quest, was warned by his elders against accepting too generous a gift of power from the deities. This was the matter-of-fact parent's euphemistic way of saying, 'Do not let them deceive you or work evil upon you.' The thinker, of course, interpreted this in an entirely different fashion. For him, a faster who accepted more from the gods than he could fulfill was the victim of his own overreaching and lack of that sense of proportion which, alone, can save man from destruction.

This recognition, then, of the ambivalent or, at least, veiled nature of the deity's attitude toward him is something that man must learn to accept and which he must also learn to meet in such fashion that

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

the spirit or deity will be constrained, willingly or otherwise, to grant him his request. How can this be done? The answer will depend upon who is speaking, a Winnebago layman or a Winnebago priest-thinker. The layman's view is embodied in the myth of the origin and function of tobacco. There the deities are mechanically constrained to give the powers they possess to any human being who comes with an offering of tobacco. Here the human suppliant theoretically determines what he is to receive and how he is to employ it. In actual practice, of course, the situation is never so simple even in the case of the most matter-of-fact individual or the most matter-of-fact deity. Both are swayed by contradictory and conflicting emotions. Man wishes a maximum of power but is held back from making the maximum request for fear that it will be too dangerous for him to do so. The deities wish to be sustained by the tobacco for which they have an almost uncontrolled craving but dread the loss of power it entails. As a result man is prone to ask too little or too much and the deities to give too little or too much. Both lead to disorder and result in evil.

To restore order in such a situation where, on the one hand, you are dealing with human nature with its ceaseless changes, its impermanence and its inability to foresee the future and the consequences of its demands and, on the other, with divine nature, with its unchangeability, its permanence and its foreknowledge, was a problem of extreme difficulty and delicacy. The added fact that, according to the universally accepted Winnebago belief, the spirits and deities depended for their happiness and much of their functioning upon the sustenance they obtained from man, further complicated it. The problem, of course, existed primarily for the priest-thinker.

To a large degree it was of the latter's own making. To the matter-of-fact man, the man of action, the relationship between the deities and man was, as has already been pointed out, direct, mechanical and constraining for both. It was but an extension of the theory of exchange of goods which prevailed on earth between men, to the world of spirits. That theory of exchange insisted that the receiver of a gift should always make a return gift of greater value than that which he had received. Of the spirits who had so much, man could

105 at least, demand an equal exchange. The crux of the question then
771 was, who is to evaluate the human gift? The answer of the mat-
776 ter-of-fact man was both, the spirits and man. For that reason, he contended, risk and danger must always inhere in the human-god relationship and there was little that could be done about it except to take every precaution one could. This must be accepted. Such was life. Suffering and tragedy loomed large there and the relationship between the deities and man was part of it. The gods could, at best, only help man to keep his balance and maintain his sense of proportion. It had always been a human problem and always would remain one. A whole class of literature, the worak, dealt with this theme. The picture it painted was not too optimistic.

105 It was the priest-thinker who was the optimist. He attempted a
771 time-honored solution of philosophers, that of giving man some of
776 the attributes of divinity, in other words, a greater sense of fixity and
812 security, a greater degree of permanence, and some possibility of foreknowledge.

Winnebago philosophers seem to have attacked this problem repeatedly and suggested a number of solutions. According to one theory, gods and men had been equal in the beginning. At that time all existent beings could transform themselves at will into the one or the other *ad infinitum*. When, however, the world was to take its present shape, all the beings had to transform themselves permanently into the one or the other, into gods or into human beings.

Thus, at one time, man had actually partaken of the divine. This
105 was, of course, only divinity in retrospect, and was not of great
771 importance in developing divine stature for man now. Winnebago
775 thinkers, instead, fell back upon two universally accepted folkloristic beliefs, that in the immortality of the soul and that in reincarnation. The first, however, implied a complete and irretrievable separation from the earth and human beings. To be of any value in the task of developing divine traits for man, the soul, the permanent component of man which left him at death had to be bound, in some way, to the earth. This could best be done by reinterpreting the nature of death. This was done by having it merely imply no loss of personal consciousness at all but simply a temporary stumbling.

There existed an unbroken continuum. No more, however, could be done in the way of reinterpretation. The philosopher could not do away with the palpable fact that the body of a deceased person remained motionless and decayed. The ghost, conscious though he remained and fully aware of what was going on around him, was unable to establish contact with the living or they with him and he always remained jealous of the living and not too kindly disposed to them. The continuum predicated was, consequently, reduced to a mere shadow.

With the belief in reincarnation, the priest-thinker could do much more. Here a kind of continuum already existed. The priest-thinker had merely to develop the concept of a continuing consciousness. Thus the first attribute of divinity, permanence, was on its way to accomplishment. This permanence was further enhanced and fixed by having an individual born again into the very same family and reliving, in every detail, his previous existence.

In the myth giving the origin of the Four Nights' Wake over the body of the dead, this is the main and insistent theme. Thus the second attribute of divinity, unchangeability, was on its way to accomplishment. The two other traits of divinity, foreknowledge and omnipresence, presented greater difficulties for their attainment. The latter, however, was not of great significance in the Winnebago concept of divinity. The former was. Here the belief in reincarnation offered little help. Recourse had therefore to be made to shamanistic practices and magic proper where both beliefs were quite common. On the whole the Winnebago priest-thinker, particularly in his greatest triumph, the Medicine Rite, eschewed magical practices and that is why little really is ever said about foretelling events. Yet it is significant that the very first story in the Medicine Rite and the one which purports to be the account of how the Rite was begun by a man, makes this foreknowledge of the future, the basic gift that a prospective member received. How fundamental it remained is proved by the fact that when the Peyote Cult was introduced among the Winnebago, the two gifts the peyote bestowed were the foretelling of the future and the ability to transport oneself anywhere by mere thought.

105 771 776 The priest-thinker thus contended that man could be made to approximate to the deities by simply manipulating powers and attributes which some individuals, at least, already possessed. Was it, however, wise to leave it to the individual himself to attempt this approximation? There had always been individuals in the community who essayed it but the net results of their attempts had spelled misfortune for them and misfortune for the community. They were generally the practitioners of evil magic, the poisoners. The Medicine Rite is replete with stories about them. Apparently, then, this was not a matter to be left to the discretion of an individual or for that matter to human beings at all. Man was to be educated to divinity by the deities themselves. For this purpose both were to be transformed into more disciplined, more responsible, more ethical and more profoundly realistic beings. Just as in the attainment of the goods of life, so now in the attainment of the benefits flowing from divinity, he was to face the problem bravely and realistically and endure stoically and understandingly the hardships and sufferings involved. In short, divinity had to be achieved. It could not be thrust upon one. The deities, likewise, had to be educated and be made to realize that nothing was due them as such and that they could expect no sustenance from man unless their own way of life was organized and ethically ordered and unless their blessings were given in good faith and in gratitude.

105 771 776 538 The poet-philosophers composed many a worak to bring out just these points. To give an example. A child is fasting and refuses one gift after another from the deities. Perturbed, they turn to the father and ask him to discover what the boy wants that has not already been granted him. In answer to his father's question, the boy says he does not wish to die. Neither the entreaties of the father or the spirits avail. And so the boy must die although he is rewarded by being transformed into a pine tree.

Now this is actually a completely transformed version of a well-known story, *The Child Who Fasted Too Long*. In the original version he dies because he has overreached himself. In such stories the spirits are neutral, that is, where they are not actually inciting

the young faster to overreach and destroy himself. Thus we see along what lines the reinterpretations of the priest-thinker were made. 105 771

This was the theory that the priest-thinker tried to impress upon his fellowmen in order to introduce a greater sense of confidence and security in the relationship between man and the deities. Because of the very high demands it made upon the worshipper, it remained largely a philosophical-ethical ideal and the fairly sharp line of demarcation between human beings and the spirits continued in force as the popular theory. Some there were who even insisted that it was, not only the courageous, but the morally justifiable thing to do, to coerce the deities into acquiescing in man's demands. That was the proper way to meet divinity, to challenge the gods, accept what they granted and, then, to attempt to fulfill the conditions imposed even if they meant death. Few individuals in the community, for instance, had greater prestige than the few who had secured a blessing from the much dreaded deity, *Disease-giver*. He had two faces, one dealing life and the other death. No suppliant knew which side would be turned toward him when he made his offerings, at noon, in the full blaze of day, contrary to what held for all the other deities, namely, that they must be approached at night. 776 [538] [554] [782]

This, of course, is the warrior's creed and, in a civilization like that of the Winnebago where the highest ambition as a man was to achieve distinction on the warpath, it naturally was very important. Yet to this, the chief of the tribe might well retort: such courage and such risks have their moral justification only when one is fighting the enemy or avenging the death of a kinsman. They are inapplicable when approaching a god. The taking of great risks concerns not only oneself but the whole community and must be subject to the sanctions of the community. A person must be carefully and properly educated before he dare take them. To exhibit fearlessness and heroic courage is, in itself, no virtue. Indeed, in the wrong place or on the wrong occasion, they can and do lead to death and destruction. 105 771 577

And so, in the realm of religion as in that of social organization and mythology, the problem to be faced is depicted as being the same. How are we to resolve the differences between the 'earth' interpre- 105 771

105 771 tation with its insistence upon warding off evil by force and obtaining good by force, and the 'sky' interpretation, with its emphasis on conciliation and appeasement and its attempts at the resolution of the opposites? The rituals take up the same question.

5. RITUALISM

105 575 571 796 There are two fundamental types of ritualistic organization among the Winnebago, those based on clan membership and those based on blessings from the same spirits. In other words, the bond is either a social one, membership in the same clan, or a spiritual one, a common religious experience. The clan rituals have one major extension, a ceremony where those members of each clan who are the guardians of the warbundle of that particular clan, gather together in a feast for all the main deities. At this ceremony they ask for the renewal of the powers of these warbundles and for the promise of success on the warpath. Set off, apparently, from these two types of ritual there is a third, the Medicine Rite, with but one example, where membership is based upon personal conduct and achievement other than war and where, usually, one can only enter when there is a vacancy caused by death. In those cases where a person became a member through personal achievement he was, in the old days, generally, a man in middle age because of the rigorous and difficult entrance requirements. When taking the place of a deceased member a person could, however, even be under twenty.

An individual is consequently either born with the right of membership in a ceremony, like the clan feasts and the warbundle feasts, or he has to achieve it, as in the ritual societies based on blessings from the same spirits and the Medicine Rite.

The clan feasts which are in honor of the ancestral clan animals need not detain us here. Nor do we have to dwell upon the ritual societies based on common supernatural experiences. For membership in the latter there are really no requirements except willingness to endure the comparatively light hardships of fasting. The spirits or deities rarely, if ever, failed to grant the suppliant a vision. Formerly,

so many Winnebago informed me, the most sacred and important of the ritual societies of this type was the Night-spirit one. It was practically gone when I first visited the tribe in 1909. In none of these rituals was there any control of membership or insistence upon a special code of conduct either before or after admission. 105 575 796 571

The warbundle ceremonies require a few words. Each performance is divided into two parts, the first presided over by the Thunderbird spirits and the second by the Night-spirits. However, all the great spirits of the Winnebago pantheon have their place in it and, to all, offerings are made. Although in the eyes of the Winnebago, the warbundle ritual is devoted entirely to the glorification of war, it is interesting and significant to see that, besides the great patrons of war, the Thunderbird spirits, Night-spirits, Sun, Morning Star, Evening Star, Disease-giver, Eagle, Black Hawk, specific peace deities like Earthmaker, Earth, Moon and Water are also included and, at times, even the hero-deities, Trickster, Turtle and Hare. From this we can infer that even in a ceremony devoted preeminently to the enhancement of the importance of the warrior and of warfare, deities symbolizing peace and the antithesis of violence and force, could not be entirely left out. Admittedly their inclusion had little effect upon the one and insistent prayer of the participants, war. Even Earthmaker is represented as bestowing success on the warpath, something completely new. Yet the mere fact that Earthmaker was included did act as a reminder that the pursuit of war was not everything. 105 721 796

The warbundle rituals represent the classic and most complete expression of the war spirit, the glorification of the viewpoint of the chief of the lower division of the tribe, namely, that one goes out to combat evil, militantly and with violence. In fact, you must preenact the enemy's attack, your method of coping with it, and the manner in which the enemy is to be defeated and overwhelmed. Even orgies, where all self-control is abandoned, are permitted, something that was always abhorrent to the normal Winnebago and greatly dreaded. The remark made to me by the Indian who translated the text, relative to such orgies is quite illuminating here. 'It is good to have one Indian work himself into a paroxysm of enthusiasm but it must never be more than one!' [786]

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But to come now to the Medicine Rite. It is only superficially that its organization is really unique, for both in the snake clan feast and in the Night-spirit ritual society there are four positions just as in the Medicine Rite. The resemblances between the latter two are, in fact, so marked that we can well understand why some Winnebago regarded the Night-spirit society as the model for the Medicine Rite. In a sense it is true that the Medicine Rite could be interpreted as the society of those who have been blessed by Earthmaker. Yet, in spite of these similarities, it was regarded as something sui generis. What is, then, the specific character of its organization that gives it this unique position in the Winnebago ritualistic system?

The answer is simple—two traits, the method of admission and the fact that a large part of the tribe belongs to it. While the size of the membership at the beginning of the nineteenth century was unquestionably larger than a hundred years before, still it must always have been very large. Moreover, there were no restrictions as to sex. Compared to any of the other ceremonies, the Medicine Rite thus stood out as a completely democratic organization where, theoretically, the only requirement was membership in the tribe.

This uniqueness in certain fundamental traits of its organization was matched by its purpose and much of its content. Its avowed purpose was, not only, to ensure man a long and happy life on earth but to ensure his return to it after death. Of course all ceremonies were concerned with the first of these two purposes. And the belief in reincarnation had always, as we have pointed out, been well-known and accepted. The uniqueness lay in the method of attaining it. That method had two parts, a magical-symbolical and an ethical-philosophical. Admission to the Rite entailed being shot and 'killed' by a missile and coming to life again. This is the magical-symbolical part. The ethical-philosophical part consisted in strict adherence to a high code of behavior laid down for you and enforced by the older members of the Rite. Only by adherence to it can you surmount death.

Yet admission is only a preliminary to your real task. It only sets your feet, so to speak, in the proper road. You must steel yourself to being shot and 'killed' innumerable times and you must obtain

mastery over death by shooting and 'killing' others innumerable times, so that death, when it finally comes, will be as familiar to you as life. Then, when full of years, you actually die, the passage from life to death will become a mere incident and, being born again will, for yourself, constitute no break with your former existence. 105 575 796 771

It is quite clear that we are dealing here with the vision of a poet-philosopher and this will become more evident when we recognize the original nature and meaning of the shooting ritual. Shooting missiles into a person was an old and well-recognized shamanistic device. The missiles were generally animal claws and they were meant to kill. Your only protection was to provide yourself with magical counter measures or, to obtain some specific blessing from a spirit. That you could convert what was meant to be a death-dealing missile into a life-giving one by leading a virtuous life was something new when applied, for instance, on the grand scale to be seen in the reinterpretation of the myth of the *Journey to Spiritland* as found in the Medicine Rite (cf. pages 257 ff.). To express it, required a particular language, with new extensions of meaning for words and in which metaphor, symbolism and mysticism ruled supreme, in short, the language of a poet and a philosopher. Myths were reinterpreted in an entirely new fashion and put to entirely new uses. To understand and comprehend it a special and difficult kind of education and training was needed.

Yet, in spite of its esoteric character, one thing was never forgotten, that the ceremony was to serve concrete purposes. It was not the vision of a Road of Perfection to be rewarded by eternal peace and happiness in heaven but, on the contrary, the vision of a Road of Perfection which was to be rewarded by a return to earth and to the vicissitudes of living. It was life that was to be faced, with all its imperfections, trials, and with all the comedies and tragedies that often played such havoc with ideals of perfection.

Indeed the imperfections of life intruded themselves into the poet-philosopher's vision, despite his attempts to exclude them. It was impossible, for instance, for individuals to forget that they were not only members of the Medicine Rite but, likewise, warriors and often shaman. Thunder, as the idealists might well do against the presence

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105 of shamanistic practices in the Rite, they could never quite exclude
575 them and the only answer they possessed was to condemn them and
771 show how they led to dishonor, death and destruction.
796 This interweaving of the concrete and the symbolic and mystical led to a double, at times even a triple, set of significances for every action and word and which, occasionally, reached incredible heights of complication, intricacy and subtlety.

105 Since no other ceremony resembles the Medicine Rite in the
174 respects just mentioned, we may well stop and ask ourselves what
796 could have led to its creation? What is the cultural meaning of this new mode of expression, this new type of reinterpretation of ancient beliefs and attitudes? Allowing for the natural creative impulses of our Winnebago poet-philosophers, it is not unreasonable to suspect that some particular circumstance or circumstances must have called them forth.

Ordinarily, any attempt to determine such a matter among the American Indians, in the absence of an authentic historic record, would mean mere speculation. Fortunately this does not hold true for the case in point. There are indications within the text of the Rite itself and some historical evidence which proves pretty conclusively that, in its present form, the Medicine Rite is a development late in Winnebago history and after the coming of the French in 1632. We can, in fact, date it more precisely. The otterskin pouch and the shell used in the shooting ceremony come from the *midewiwin* ceremony of the Ojibwa. The Winnebago obtained them from the Fox and this could not possibly have been before 1680-1690.

Now, the Winnebago between 1650-1900 were passing through a very serious crisis. Their numbers had been seriously decimated by ferocious struggles between them and the Illinois and Fox and by the diseases introduced by the Europeans. The influence of the French, as well as the new conditions resulting from French encroachment, were playing havoc with the old order of things. Nor must we underrate the influence of the French missionaries.

[159] That a new type of ceremony should have appeared among the Winnebago just then cannot be ascribed to mere chance. It must bear some relation to the crisis. The moment we put the two to-

gether much that would otherwise remain inexplicable about the Medicine Rite becomes clear—its nostalgia for the past, the idealistic and idyllic setting, the absence of any reference to war, the insistent condemnation of shamanistic practices. We can then see it for what it is, the attempt of the priest-poet-philosopher to meet the new and hitherto unknown threats to the old way of life by demonstrating, first, what merit and virtue inhered in the Winnebago civilization of the past and, secondly, by showing how it could be recovered and safeguarded against all outside attacks. The creators of this ritual-drama were concerned only with the description of the Road of Perfection, a road that was to lead the Winnebago back to the past and then forward again. Only if we fully realize that we are not dealing here simply with the inward vision of some poet-philosopher but with the spiritual crisis of a people will we be able to explain the burning intensity that animates the participants.

But, let us forget for the moment the fact that the Medicine Rite is of late appearance in Winnebago history and let us forget the crisis that gave it birth and try to assign it its proper place in Winnebago thought.

We saw before how the warrior ideal received its glorification in the warbundle ceremonies. Nothing comparable to such a eulogy of war and of the warrior's viewpoint existed for the other half of Winnebago life, for the arts of peace. Indications that it was attempted are innumerable but these attempts seem never to have succeeded to any marked degree.

And so the Winnebago, apparently, had to wait until late in their history, until a crisis of major proportions was threatening to disrupt their whole culture, before the ideal which had always been expressed in the symbol of the chief of the tribe could find its full and adequate expression in the present Medicine Rite. That this expression came so late in their history must not obscure the fact that it represents part of a very old struggle between two aspects of Winnebago life that had always been seeking a resolution. It is not only in Winnebago history that a philosophical-ethical ideal has received its highest expression in the midst of a social-economic crisis, as I need hardly point out.

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

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Whether, before the coming of the Whites, other crises of equal intensity had ever threatened the security of Winnebago life we do not, of course, know. What we do know, however, is that before Winnebago civilization finally broke up and disintegrated completely, about twenty years ago, a religion of a new type essayed the same task that the Medicine Rite had undertaken and developed a ritual of considerable beauty with a quality all its own. I am, of course, referring to the Peyote Cult.

6. THE HISTORY OF THE MEDICINE RITE

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The Medicine Rite is clearly the product of a long development. For proof of this we have not only direct historical evidence but fairly convincing internal evidence. I have already called attention to the fact that the otterskin pouch, the shell and, in fact, much of the whole present shooting ritual stems originally from the *midewiwin* ceremony of the Ojibwa. We know that they are the originators of it and that it spread from them to the Pottawattomie, Menominee and Fox and then to the eastern Dakota and Iowa. The eastern Dakota already had it in 1765. The Winnebago were brought into contact with it by the Fox and the Iowa. We must assume that this could not possibly have been earlier than 1690 and, far more likely, it was later, anywhere between 1710 and 1730. To judge from its present form and content, nothing else was borrowed than the shooting ritual and its appurtenances, apart from a number of songs, at least, from the linguistically and culturally distinct Fox. More was probably borrowed from the linguistically and culturally closely related Iowa.

Two introductory narratives (pages 92 f. and 94 f.)[1] profess to tell how some of the pouches were obtained but they can hardly be accepted as too accurate. In so far as any credence can be placed on what they say, it would appear that they were presented to two Winnebago, whose names are given. No mention, however, is made by the givers of these gifts, one an Iowa and the other a Fox Indian, of their be-

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[1] [not processed - Analyst]

longing to the *midewiwin*. Nor do the two Winnebago say anything about their having been incorporated into a ceremony of their own. Yet some connection there must once have been between these gifts and the beginnings of our Medicine Rite, for otherwise there would have been no conceivable reason for their inclusion. 105 196 174

Since everything else in the Medicine Rite of today, apart from the shooting ritual, is so completely different from the Ojibwa and Menominee *midewiwin*, the only two we know reasonably well, we must assume either that a new ceremony was created then and there with the shooting ritual as its nucleus or that the shooting ritual was incorporated into an older Winnebago ceremony. All the evidence at our disposal points to the latter alternative. We have also to assume that this older ceremony contained shamanistic practices of the type that were characteristic of the Night-spirits' Rite.

That it was not the Night-spirits' Rite itself upon which the Ojibwa shooting ritual was grafted, of that there can be little doubt. Fortunately, we have a clue from a very unexpected source, the Pawnee. These Indians have a ceremony called *The Ceremony of the Medicine Men*, where we find the following remarkable resemblances to the Medicine Rite: a shooting ritual which causes the individuals shot to fall prostrate to the ground as if dead and then rise again; the conception that the framework of the lodge consists of snakes; a figure called the sacred woman; the importance of Turtle; a membership possessing occult powers strictly guarded and kept secret from the outside world; a highly elaborate symbolism, etc. Chance must be ruled out here. The only thing we have to decide is how the Winnebago happen to possess a ceremony so similar to that of the distant Pawnee with whom they had practically no contact. Direct borrowing is out of the question. 105 171 174 196

To me there seems to be only one possible explanation, namely, that the Winnebago and the Pawnee, the Winnebago to a smaller extent, were members of that larger civilization which we mentioned before and which had its roots in Mexico, and of which the Pawnee have preserved the essential traits whereas the Winnebago have preserved only vague memories of it and some special survivals.

Assuming then that the older ceremony upon which the Ojibwa

10:Radin E-5 (1908-1913) 1945
NP12 Winnebago NP12

105 171 174 796 shooting ritual, plus its appurtenances, the otterskin pouch and the shell, were grafted, was in content very much like the present Pawnee *Ceremony of the Medicine Men* and, organizationally, like the Night-spirits Society; let us see now what changes were necessary to have this older ceremony approximate to the present Medicine Rite.

105 174 796 First, of course, the meaning of the missile shot into the individual being initiated and into the members of the Rite had to be reinterpreted and its overt shamanistic implications removed. The stimulus for that unquestionably came from the Ojibwa shooting ritual. The linkage of the shooting ritual with the doctrine of reincarnation is, however, something entirely new.

The second transformation came about when the Tear-Pouring ritual was grafted upon this older rite. This last named ritual, apparently, was part of the very elaborate ceremonies connected with the dead although, today, it is not found in the official Four Nights' Wake. What is, however, found there is the myth of the *Journey to Spiritland* which has been taken over *in toto* into the Medicine Rite and subjected to a complete and fundamental reinterpretation. I feel that it is the linkage of these elements from the funeral rites with the older form of the Medicine Rite that brought about its basic transformation and gave us the Rite of today, with its stress on reincarnation and on the doctrine of the Road.

The third new trait requiring an explanation is the role of Earth-maker. He is a very old Winnebago deity and was evidently regarded as the supreme deity before the coming of the Europeans. He seems, in fact, to be the counterpart of the well-known Pawnee supreme deity *Tirawa*. Nevertheless, the influence of Christianity in, at least, unifying his characteristics and functions and accentuating his supremacy over the other deities, as well as the theory that he is the creator of all things, must not be excluded. The association of the two crossed lines with him cannot be accidental, even although the symbol itself is very old and is more specifically connected with the cardinal points.

There is, besides, some semihistorical evidence for indirect Christian influence. In a narrative purporting to be an account of the origin of a well-known French half-breed family among the Winne-

bago, named Decora, a statement is made that the son of the French founder of the family by the daughter of the tribal chief, introduced the figure of Earthmaker into the Medicine Rite. Such an individual would, indeed, have been the ideal person to have done just this. According to the narrative, he was taken, while still a very young child, to France and brought up there for a number of years. He was still only a boy when his excessive homesickness forced his father to send him back to Wisconsin and there he was rigorously subjected to the old Winnebago education for youths. 105 174 796

Thus he was almost made to order to symbolize the meeting of the two civilizations and to become one of individuals best qualified to understand the nature of the crisis threatening his people and the need for a new religious and philosophical synthesis to surmount it, at least, spiritually . . .

It is in some such fashion that we must visualize the growth and development of the Medicine Rite. Only if we bear in mind the various strands that have gone into its making and only, when we realize that in its final integrated form, it is a work of art sprung out of the poignant needs of a people facing a soul-trying ordeal, only then, can it be properly understood, evaluated and appreciated.

[AP 78 ff. not processed]